

Ann Ferguson

Menu in the Woods

We Need Not Starve -- Oregon and the Northwest is blessed with an abundance of edible plants. We are doubly blessed in that so few plants of Oregon are poisonous.

Survival at any season will not be a problem in Oregon, though at some seasons food plants are more plentiful and the variety in diet can be greater.

So many of us think only of the berries when it comes to utilizing the native plants, but all other parts are used depending on the plant. We can use the dry seed of Wocus or yellow pond lily and many of the grasses for meal or flour; the leaves of the dandelion or skunk cabbage provide excellent food. The stems of the grasses when young provide water and salad, while the young stems of the ferns provide a good cooked vegetable; the roots of many plants such as the Brodiaea, the Camas, and the Wapato provide excellent food. This variety of parts utilized helps to make the survival diet more balanced.

Water so important to survival is provided by plants in several ways. The succulent leaves of the Miner's lettuce and others are filled with water especially early in the mornings before transpiration has become rapid because of heat and winds; even in the summer we usually find some dew on the leaves early in the morning. Thus water is quite plentiful in succulent stems and fruits of most plants.

The entree for the meal comes from wild animals of some type that we may obtain. The rest of the meal - the salad, the vegetable, the seasoning, and the dessert - comes from the plants we obtain.

Green Salad

Candy flower and Miner's Lettuce -- are plentiful, quite tasty and make a nutritious salad -- really much better for you than the bleached inner leaves of a head of lettuce purchased at home.



Sheep Sorrel -- is found quite commonly on the acid soils of Western Oregon. It is very flavorful in a salad.

Oxalis-- is one of the major ground cover plants in the woods of Western Oregon. Leaves are very palatable, but make the best salad if you mix them with other leaves.

Common Dandelion -- (not a false one) makes either a good fresh salad or can be cooked as greens. The water in which you cooked this dandelion for greens should be saved as it would be rather nutritious.

Cooked Vegetables

Nettles -- when collected while young they do not sting the hands much if any, and do provide excellent cooked greens from which the water should be discarded.

Sour Dock -- the leaves when young and cooked are excellent greens and this plant is found quite plentiful in areas along streams and in the open.

Skunk Cabbage is a good cooked vegetable after it is boiled twice and water discarded each time. Uncooked skunk cabbage contains an acid that makes one think they are eating fire. If you must, sample lightly and while near home!

Fern fiddle-necks -- (the young growth before the frond develops) are excellent cooked. The hair on the necks should be rubbed off. The fiddle necks of all our major ferns make a fair substitute for asparagus.

Mushrooms -- are nourishing and quite plentiful, but be sure you know what you are eating. Some of our mushrooms are extremely poisonous. Most shelf fungus growing on the dead logs are edible but sometimes not too palatable.

Lichens - are edible when boiled, but the best way to use them is as a flavoring or thickening in the stew. The best way to treat lichen is to dry, shred, then cook.

Tea -- tea can be made by brewing the needles of either the western or mountain hemlock or the sitka or Engelmann spruce. The tea will be pungent. Instead of lemon which you won't find growing in Oregon and Washington, try a little Mint for spice. This mint is a good season for your meat dish too.

Seasoning

Licorice fern -- the root of the licorice fern makes good seasoning. A little goes quite a ways in seasoning your wild meat. It is also good to chew on instead of that candy bar you don't have.

Colts foot -- If you must have salt for your meal, collect this and dry the leaves, burn them, and use the ash for salt. It works!

Thimble berry -- is found throughout Western Oregon in July.

Salmon berry -- comes on in early June and lasts for at least a month. The seeds are large but the flavor is pretty good.

Wild blackcap -- ripens in late June and is good as the tame ones at home and makes just as permanent dye post.

Trailing wild blackberry -- found especially in burned-over areas in the month of July and early August. This berry is very delicious.

Evergreen blackberries -- found in August to October.

Indian Peach or Plum -- ripens in late June and is edible but not the most palatable. The nut inside the seed is actually the best part of this fruit.

Red Elderberry -- ripens in September to December and is excellent when fresh and cooked; and they may even ferment if you plan to sit around that long.

Oregon wild crabapple -- is good eating in late August to November.

Oregon grape - the berries are edible and quite highly flavorful in July and August.

Western Hazel -- the nuts are excellent if you can beat the Jays and the squirrels, or perhaps you can share the nuts they collect. In fact, these two animals might provide you a suitable entree to the meal you are topping off with the nuts.

After this bountiful meal you may need medical assistance. Vitamin C comes in excellent form in young willow tips and the fruit of the wild rose. There are no better sources. A laxative, if needed, is provided in the form of Cascara.

As we forage for food, take a hint from the other animals -- don't run all over using up needed energy, and choose the best parts of the day for obtaining food. When foraging for the sake of survival -- one nibbles and concentrates on food collections rather than hunger or your plight.

I have the will to survive, so will be careful not to include in my meal the fruit of the baneberry, Oregon's most poisonous fruit; nor will I include the Water, or Poison Hemlock. It got Socrates, and I am stronger.

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